

908
L26
Copy 1

A
Descriptive
Reading
ON

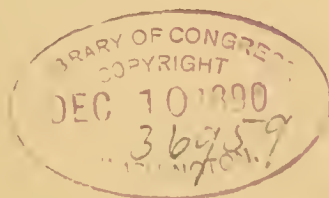
ALASKA

Illustrated
BY
12 Lantern Slides

WILLIAM H. RAU
PHILADELPHIA
1890

A
DESCRIPTIVE READING
ON
ALASKA

ILLUSTRATED BY TWELVE LANTERN
SLIDES



WILLIAM H. RAU
PHILADELPHIA
1890

Copyright, 1890, by William H. Rau.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

1. Totem Posts.
2. Sitka from the Castle.
3. Street in Sitka.
4. Russian Castle, etc.
5. Greek Church in Sitka.
6. Block House, Sitka.
7. Harbor of Juneau.
8. Pyramid Harbor.
9. Karta Bay.
10. Indian Women.
11. Muir Glacier.
12. Curios.

ALASKA.

THE rich territory of Alaska, which Russia virtually presented as a gift to this country in 1867, when it was transferred to the United States for \$7,200,000 in gold, made our National domain about one-sixth larger than it was prior to that time. Its distance from the greater part of our country has made it look small, but a thought as to its more than half a million square miles of territory, with its lofty mountains and great rivers, its 4,000 miles of coast, and its island chain stretching out more than a thousand miles toward the Asiatic coast, must quickly dispel such an idea, while even but a casual consideration of the vast advantages which will accrue to this country when its universal resources are more fully developed must bring the conviction that the overture of Secretary Seward which brought into our hands such a treasure was one of the wisest acts in that great statesman's career.

1. Totem Posts.—These curiously carved pillars, known as totem posts, have been the subject of much discussion, and various significations have been ascribed to them. Henry W. Elliott, of the Smithsonian Institution, who has written a valuable book on "Our Arctic Province" says: "The oddly-carved totem posts, which appear in every village, sometimes like a forest of dead trees at distant sight, are, broadly speaking, divisible unto two classes; that is to say,

the clan or family pillars, and those erected as memorials of the dead. There has been too much written in regard to these grotesque features seeking to endow them with idolatry, superstitions and other fancies of the savage mind. Nothing of the kind, in my opinion, belongs to the subject. The image posts of the totem order are generally from 30 to 50 feet in height, with a diameter of 3 to 5 feet at the base, tapering slightly upward. Those grotesque figures which cover these posts from top to bottom, closely, grouped together, have little or no serious significance whatever; they always display the totem of the owner, and a very marked similarity runs through the carvings of this character in each village, though they have a wide range of variation when one settlement is contrasted with another. I am unable to give any definite explanation, that is worthy of attention, of the real meaning of all those strange designs, perhaps, in truth there is none; they are simply ornamental doorways."

2. Sitka from the Castle.—The port of Sitka, the capital and chief town of Alaska, is situated on the west coast of Baranov Island, and its location is considered one of the finest, for natural beauty and impressiveness of scenery, to be found in the whole country. It was founded in 1799 by Alexander Baranov, a bold, indomitable and cruel man of great executive talent who subjugated the natives of this region and established the Russian domination which continued until the territory was secured by the United States. Its early history is a story of violence and bloodshed and there were many fierce conflicts

between the Russians and the natives before the position of the former as rulers became secure. But the place was formerly a scene of much greater activity than it is now under the quieter rule of the American government. Then there was a large Russian garrison and many official representatives of the government at St. Petersburg, besides the imposing ecclesiastical establishment maintained by the Bishop of the Greek Church whose jurisdiction covered all Alaska, not to mention the stir caused by the numerous vessels arriving and departing, owing to the concentration of the entire trade of the territory at this port. It is known as one of the rainiest places in the world outside of the tropics.

3. Street in Sitka.—The contrast of the present Sitka with the Russian Sitka is a striking one. Travelers say that the general air of the place is one of decay. The original Russian houses scattered through the town are falling into ruin and half of them are tenantless, the present population not being more than half of what it was under Russian rule, when the commerce of the territory was concentrated here. In one direction Sitka has progressed under American dominion, and that is in the way of cleanliness. The Russian officers were content to have their own quarters clean and did not concern themselves about the rest of the town. The American garrison, however, when it took possession of the town, undertook a sanitary reformation and made a considerable improvement by laying sidewalks and curbs, placing gravel in the streets in order to make travel in them more agreeable, besides repairing and

repainting some of the older houses. They also constructed the first wagon road in Alaska extending about a mile from the steamer's landing-place back to Indian River.

4. Russian Castle, etc.—One of the most striking features in the Sitkan landscape, seen in the left of the picture, is the Russian Castle. The castle was built by Baranov, after he had captured its site from the natives in a bloody battle, in 1804. This fortification became the nucleus of the settlement, then officially known as New Archangel, but whose name in time came to be Sitka, derived from the name of the savage tribe Seet-kah. In the castle and the large apartment houses built by the Russians, the conquerors lived in great comfort, the buildings being constructed so as to afford ample protection against the weather, and well furnished. At the castle a lavish hospitality was dispensed, and it is told that the entertainment given to favored guests would have been fit for royalty itself. All this, however, is a thing of memory only, and the old stronghold now crumbles slowly into ruin for want of use. Its decay is slow on account of its substantial construction, but the damp climate is bound to come off conqueror. The panorama from its cupola is one of exceeding beauty, including a fine view of the Bay of Sitka with its many little islands, and with the mountains for a background.

5. Greek Church, Sitka.—This view shows the finest building the capital can boast, that is to say the Greek Church, which did not pass out of the custody

of the original owners when the territory changed proprietors. As may be seen, the church has been kept in pretty good repair. While the pomp attending the ministrations of the time when a Bishop of Alaska made this his Episcopal residence, has become a matter of history only, the church is still richly furnished with silverware and candleabra, and its walls plentifully decorated with pictures, and the two priests who officiate at its altar are attired in rich vestments. A choir of boys sings the musical parts of the service. There are no seats and the worshipers may either stand or kneel as the exigencies of the service require. There is also a Russian chapel for the Indians and a Lutheran chapel, both falling into ruin.

6. Block-house, Sitka.—In the panorama of Sitka the old block-house ranks with the Greek Church and the Russian Castle, as one of the prominent landmarks. It is a relic of the times when the savageness of the natives and the severity of their Russian conquerors made their intercourse one of continuous enmity, if not open fighting. An idea of the necessity for such defenses is had from the story of an occurrence that took place in the winter of 1799–1800. Baranov and his force had erected a stockaded post on the main island a few miles north of the present site of Sitka, but two American fur-trading vessels appeared and opened a fur traffic with the natives, as it appeared, in contempt of the rights of Baranov. The bold Baranov resolved to stop such a proceeding and hastened away to the Russian Company's headquarters at Kadiak for help to drive away the intruders. In his absence, however, a greater calamity than the presence of the

enterprising Americans befel the post, as the Koloshians rose and wiped the post out of existence, several thousand of them by a pre-arranged plan, surrounding the block-house, massacring its inmates and carrying off over 3,000 skins from the storehouses. Four years later Baranov drove the savages out of their fortifications on the present site of the castle, and founded the present town of Sitka. It was probably at this period that the block-house was built.

7. Harbor of Juneau.—The harbor of Juneau City whose morning mists are here seen melting before the rising sun, is the shipping point for the only mining center in the territory of Alaska at the present day. A persistent search has been made for the precious metals in this part of the territory and gold can be found in the sand of all the streams, but seldom in quantities to justify the opening of a mining settlement. Juneau City is a big name for a small village of rough mining cabins located on the north side of Gastineaux Channel. Near by, on Douglas Island, is located the large gold-quartz stamp-mill of the Treadwell Mine, where there is what is supposed to be an inexhaustible vein of rich ore. The diggings at Juneau City are on the placer order and their output limited. The first prospecting party camped here in 1880.

8. Pyramid Harbor.—The shore of this Bay, with its border of forest, scarcely bears the appearance of an Arctic coast, yet, it lies about 2500 miles north of San Francisco, and part of the year twilight here lasts all night. From the line of trees and the

mountainous nature of the background, it might be supposed to have been a piece of the coast of Maine. In the Sitkan region saw-mills have been erected to saw up the timber found there. The varieties in the vicinity of the capital include the yellow and red cedar, the Sitkan spruce which is the most abundant variety, besides the hemlock and the balsam fir. The cedar is the most valuable of the lot. The forests are almost impenetrable owing to the great growth of brush which encumbers the ground. This condition of affairs is attributed to the absence of forest fires, which in our own country do such inestimable damage, which immunity is due to the extraordinary dampness of the climate, caused by the drizzling rain that falls the greater part of the time. The cedar is usually found nearest the shore. Ferns of the most beautiful description grow luxuriantly in the underbrush. On other parts of the coast many of the trees characteristic of lower latitudes are found.

9. Karta Bay.—In Karta Bay which is described as one of the loveliest bodies of water that can well be imagined are caught some of the finest salmon known to exist, and which constitute one of Alaska's great sources of wealth. These wonderful fish are known all over the world through the agency of the canning factories located on the fishing grounds. The king salmon reaches an average length of four feet, and an average weight of at least fifty pounds. They come in from the sea in the latter part of May and as they run along the shore seeking the outlets of the rivers, up which they go to spawn, the natives spear them in great numbers. This vast wealth of

food, however, is greatly wasted by the natives, and it has been estimated that each Indian of the Cook's Inlet region provides for himself a daily allowance of about ten pounds of salmon, in addition to all the food, such as meat, berries, etc. The size of the schools in which the salmon travel in parts of the Alaskan region is indicated by the statement, seriously made, that in the river at Karlook, the run is so great at times that it interferes with the free movement of canoes crossing the stream.

10. Indian Women.—As will be noticed the Indians of Alaska have progressed considerably in the outward ways of civilization, having virtually discarded their savage dress and with it such barbaric ornaments as rings through their lips and noses. Says Prof. Elliott: "The daily routine of the dusky housekeeper is a very different one indeed from that characteristic of woman's labor in caring for our homes. No sweeping or dusting in the Indian *rancherie*; no bed-chambers to change the linen in and tidy up; no kitchen or servants to look after; nothing whatever of the kind. Yet the Indian matron is always busy. She has to hew the firewood and drag it in; she has to carry water and attend to all of the rude cooking and filling of the trenchers; she looks after the mats and the sewing of the children's furs and other garments—not much to be sure in the way of dress making—she has to make all of the tedious berry trips, picking and drying of the fruit, as well as attending to the preservation, in the same manner, of the fish and game which the man brings in. She has an infinite amount of drudging to do in the line of

gathering certain herbs, bark and shell-fish. She has, however, no washing whatever of clothes to do for anybody, except what little she may see fit to do for herself; she never treats the dishes even to that ordeal. Every individual attends to his or her own washing—if the husband wants a clean shirt, he washes it himself."

11. Muir Glacier.—It has been estimated that there are more than 5,000 glaciers on the slopes of the lofty chain of mountains that form the eastern boundary of our arctic territory, from Mt. St. Elias southward,—reminders of that distant epoch, when, according to Agassiz, a great ocean of ice, sweeping down from the polar region, engulfed half the earth. While many of these great masses of ice never emerge from the narrow waterways among the islands along the coast, some however, like the Muir glacier, which we see here, occupy positions fronting on the deep water, so that vessels may go directly up to their bases. The Muir glacier, was named in honor of Professor John Muir, the Pacific coast geologist who is believed to be the first white man to explore the glaciers of Glacier Bay. It varies in the height of its escarpment from 100 to 500 feet, and no bottom is found just off the glacier at 600 fathoms. Its length is variously stated to be from 40 to 200 miles, and at its termination it is about 3 miles wide. Its average movement is 40 feet per day and it discharges daily into the ocean about 150,000,000 cubic feet of ice, which breaks off in avalanches and rushes down into the water with terrific crashes and roars. The glaciers of Alaska, while not rivalling in size the vast

ice accumulations of Greenland, surpass in grandeur any of the better known glaciers in the Alps or Himalayas, the Muir being from 5 to 10 times larger than the glacier of Mt. Blanc.

12. Curios.—Here we have a group of Alaskan curiosities collected by Dr. Charles Schaffer of Philadelphia. The most conspicuous objects are the snow shoes, purchased of a squaw at Pyramid Harbor. At the upper corners are seen baskets, bought at Juneau, woven of the bark of roots, dyed, making strong and durable receptacles capable of holding water. Beneath one of the baskets is a wooden porridge basin, and below the other a wooden medicine stick or charm. The central figure and the two images on either side are representations of totem posts at Sitka. Beside the central figure on the right is a wooden toy-boat. Other objects in the group are a salad spoon and fork, two carved horn spoons, several silver bracelets, and a *stone* pipe covered with grotesque figures of animals. The cumbrous V-shaped article in the lower left-hand corner is a wooden fish-hook with an iron barb tied on with strips of bark. Near the central and upper portion of the group are four bone charms with curved handles, used by the medicine men, and said to be held in such superstitious awe by the Indians that they will not enter a room where they are kept if they know it. In the centre is a 6 inch rule by which the size of the various articles may be calculated.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 017 188 654 5